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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 RANGOON 001357

SIPDIS

SENSITIVE

STATE FOR EAP/BCLTV, DRL,INL, G/TIP, STATE PASS LABOR FOR
ILAB, COMMERCE FOR ITA JEAN KEELY, TREASURY FOR OASIA JEFF
NEIL, USPACOM FOR FPA

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: PHUM ELAB PGOV BM

SUBJECT: BURMA TO HOST MAJOR REGIONAL TIPS CONFERENCE

REF: A. RANGOON 1301

1B. RANGOON 1132 AND PREVIOUS

11. (SBU) Summary: The Burmese Government, with support from the United Nations, is preparing to host a three-day regional conference on trafficking in persons, October 27-29. This is a safe issue for the generals. It provides an easy platform on which to interact with their neighbors and to improve their international image. There are few signs, however, that they will be able to control fully either domestic or international trafficking in Burma in the near future. End Summary.

12. (U) The Governments of Burma, Cambodia, China, Laos, Thailand, and Vietnam plan to meet at the ministerial level in Rangoon on October 29 to sign a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) committing their governments to cooperate against trafficking in persons (TIPS). Staff work and substantive coordination are being provided by the United Nations Inter-Agency Project on Human Trafficking in the Greater Mekong Sub-Region (UNIAP), a Bangkok-based organization located in the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) with offices in each of the participating countries.

13. (U) The objectives of the MOU are to facilitate inter-governmental cooperation among the participants in all areas of trafficking, including repatriation and labor. The agreement also aims to strengthen bilateral agreements reached earlier on related issues between Thailand-Cambodia (2003) and Thailand-Laos (2004). Understandings reached previously between Thai and Burmese authorities served as the basis for the repatriation of twenty Burmese girls from Mai Sai to Tachileik on August 10. Six Burmese girls were handed over by Thai authorities to Burmese Embassy officials in Bangkok and repatriated in December 2003. The MOU aims to extend such bilateral cooperation through both additional formal agreements on specific issues of particular interest to the participating governments and informal understandings on problems as they occur.

14. (U) In addition to the foregoing, UNIAP's acting director, Susu Thathoun (Burmese), told poloff recently that the MOU signing will be preceded by two days of talks among senior officers of the participating governments, October 27-28, aimed at developing an "action plan" to support the MOU's objectives. A follow-on senior officers' meeting is scheduled for Hanoi in March 2005 to review and refine the plan. Plans for a subsequent ministerial level meeting in China are underway.

Background--A Big Tent Over the MOU

15. (U) UNIAP was formed in 2000 and now brings together, according to Susu Thathoun, "six governments, twelve U.N. agencies, eight international NGOs, and a wide variety of local partners in the anti-trafficking community." She said the Chinese government has played an important role in the formative process, and was instrumental in launching the MOU.

16. (U) UNIAP draws help from faith-based organizations, INGOs, U.N. agencies, and the Australian Government. World Vision, with support from the Department, has been an important player in Burma. Through an Australian Aid project, "Asia Regional Cooperation to Prevent People Trafficking," Australian police officers are training counterparts in anti-trafficking units in Burma (ref A), Cambodia, Laos, and Thailand, all of whom are expected to be involved in supporting the MOU.

17. (SBU) Susu Thathoun cited the drafting in September of a Burmese law against trafficking as a major breakthrough in the international community's relationship on trafficking issues with the Burmese regime. After some urging, the latter agreed to allow open discussion about the new law among all concerned--Burmese and foreigners--during the drafting process. Accepting this arrangement had not been "intuitive" among the generals and other government officials, who nevertheless recognized the value of doing so in the end. The draft law is now under inter-agency review

and is expected to be approved by the SPDC in December 2004. Susu Thathoun spoke very highly of the work done on the law by Burkhard Damon, an official with the United Nations Office of Drug and Crime Control (UNODC) in Vienna.

18. (SBU) Comment: We are encouraged by the procedural gains described above (and we are also impressed with UNIAP's Susu Thathoun, a Burmese citizen with Mon-Arakanese antecedents and a Ph.d from a Japanese university). However, the impediments to effective control of trafficking of persons in Burma are great. No one in the 40-man police anti-trafficking unit (currently co-located with their Australian trainers in a house on the outskirts of Rangoon) has been deployed to the field. Agreement has apparently yet to be reached on whether to assign them to existing field units or to base them in Rangoon and deploy them on specific investigative assignments. Also, as reported previously (Ref A), they are to work solely on international trafficking cases. Domestic abuses will be handled by others. Further, according to the deputy head of the Australian training unit (John Rennie), police procedures related to trafficking are highly antiquated, with related laws dating to the 19th century.

Martinez